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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Memorandum of Conversation

NATO MINISTERIAL MEETING

April 2-4, 1959

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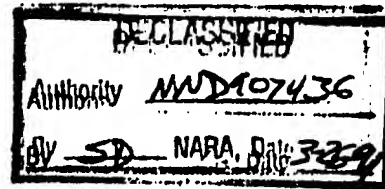
DATE: April 4, 1959

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Place: Washington

SUBJECT: Preparation of Western Position for  
Conference with Soviets

PARTICIPANTS: German Foreign Minister von Brentano  
Ambassador Grewe  
The Acting Secretary  
Mr. Merchant  
Ambassador Bruce  
Mr. Hillenbrand



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The Acting Secretary said he would like to speak frankly. We had studied the paper tabled by the Germans at the quadripartite ministerial meeting on Wednesday and it left us wondering. It seemed to contain little more than negatives. It was difficult to see how the Working Group could provide an attractive package with appeal to public opinion on the basis of such a paper, or even how the phased plan could be maintained. The Acting Secretary said he hoped that, as soon as possible, the German Government would come up with something more precise so that the Working Group could have something to begin on. The Acting Secretary said he knew, from a luncheon conversation with the German Foreign Minister, that the latter was conscious of the fact that the German paper was negative. It appeared that the Western Powers were now at a standstill as far as the preparation of their position was concerned.

Von Brentano agreed that the German paper was predominately negative. However he felt that it was realistic. He thought it fallacious solely to emphasize that West Germany had more than 50 million people, as compared with the 17 million people in East Germany, and therefore should exercise much greater attraction in terms of its flourishing economy and comparative advantages. Those who said this did not really know how a totalitarian system really operated, with its monolithic purposes opposed to the divisive forces within a democratic system. Therefore, he did not think there was a possibility of doing much more than suggested in the German paper if the risk of Communization of all of Germany were to be averted. If the recent proposals made by the SPD (which, of course, went beyond the working group paper

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group report) were to be accepted, then he could personally guarantee that, within 5 years, Germany would at least be at the stage of Communization reached by Yugoslavia.

It was difficult to find an acceptable interim approach, von Brentano continued. This would involve an attempt to synthesize fire and water. The basic differences between the two systems were too great. The Pankow regime did not want to work together with the Federal Republic, but aimed at the subversion of all Germany. Behind this regime stood the Soviets. While differences in the social and economic fields could perhaps be overcome, the cleavage in the cultural and spiritual fields was too great.

The Acting Secretary noted that, perhaps the point at which our thinking diverged most, was that we were more optimistic as to the basic strength of West Germany. We believed that a point had been reached where the West Germans would resist Communistic blandishments. From all the information available to us, and in terms of our own estimates, the Federal Republic was apparently stronger than its own Government thought it to be. We had great faith in the strength of a free system.

Von Brentano said that what would follow he would not say gladly. He also felt that we must get out of the present deadlock. However, the Federal Republic had a great responsibility for the 50 million people in West Germany and must most carefully consider to what it could afford to commit itself. Present German leaders had lived through one totalitarian regime and had experienced how incapable Democracy is of resisting a totalitarian drive to power. It was not the Government that was weak, but the people. It was not really a question of there only being 17 million people in East Germany. The Red Army was still there. Acceptance of reunification would in effect mean suicide for the officials of the GDR. They would not concede this as long as the Red Army remained there. One spoke too lightly of contacts, von Brentano said. For example, take the question of contacts in the field of justice. The concept of justice in the two Germanies was entirely different. Eighty-five percent of the judges in the GDR were so-called "Peoples Judges." The whole structure of the Soviet Zone had changed completely, and any attempts at integration would mean subversion of the West. Von Brentano indicated he would have nothing fundamentally against trying out those ideas which could be safely carried out. For example, reciprocity relative to freedom of movement would be highly desirable. There is already freedom of movement into the Federal Republic from the GDR, but the Pankow regime is not prepared to permit its own inhabitants to leave freely. However, he felt that any institutionalization would necessarily involve great dangers. Perhaps the Acting Secretary was correct in saying that the Federal Republic undervalued its own strength. This was better than to overestimate it. It could not be overlooked that a great part of the opposition in the Federal Republic favors undemocratic socialism. If the door were opened, the possibility of a coalition between the opposition party and the Communist elements in the GDR might result in a loss of control of developments in Germany. He would feel better if the

German SPD

German SPD were as reliable as the Socialists in other countries such as Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Then the Federal Republic could afford to take more risks. After all the SPD has not forgotten that Karl Marx is a common grandfather.

The Acting Secretary said that, if it were granted that the Federal Republic had a difficult problem and feared the possibility of a coalition between the SPD and East German elements, he wondered how the German Foreign Minister envisaged the resulting situation in terms of long range solutions. Did he foresee a change in the internal political situation with the opposition moving away from the extreme left, or did he hope for a cultural change?

Von Brentano once again said that he would not say gladly what was to follow. He had already hinted yesterday, in the NATO Ministerial Meeting, that any attempt to deal with the German problem in isolation would bring more dangers than opportunities. It would be better to preserve the status quo for some time than to change it by entering into risks that were not calculable. Perhaps such a development as a first step towards disarmament might change the situation by lowering tensions and reducing Soviet insistence on keeping the GDR as an integral part of the Soviet bloc. It was not pleasant for a German to have to say this, but he felt the German problem was regarded as sort of a lock on the door which everyone was trying to open in order to escape from situations of tension.

The Germans recognized their responsibility for what had happened prior to 1945. What happened after 1945 was not their fault. It was out of their reach to change the division of Germany.

The Acting Secretary commented that the problem was described in the statement that it was out of practical reach to change anything. Basically the Federal Republic did not appear to want reunification, since there are no conditions it could foresee that would make it attractive. This created difficulties for the United States, since we have been supporting the German position for many years on the assumption that efforts to eliminate one of the causes of tension might lead to some sort of disarmament possibilities. We have said that the Berlin problem can be settled only in the context of the general German problem. We would now be confined to dealing only with Berlin.

Von Brentano said that he would report this discussion carefully and in detail. He fully recognized the difficulties with which we are faced. He understood that the Germans sometimes made big demands of their allies and he also saw that it was dangerous to go into a conference if public opinion could not be given the impression that the Western Powers were prepared to go one step forward.

The Acting Secretary said he felt the Soviets would win a bloodless victory of the first order if the Western Powers took the position that they did not want any political changes.

Von Brentano

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Von Brentano said that the United States had such an excellent Ambassador in Bonn that he would be interested in hearing his comments.

Ambassador Bruce stated that he thought we faced a practical problem. He agreed that it was unrealistic to think we could give up anything in West Germany to get real concessions from the Soviets. But because of the demands of the public we could not simply fall back on the old position of free elections. If we could agree on a package with a number of offers, even if the Soviets could not accept it, this would be good. The reversion to Geneva was unacceptable. What we must attempt to do is not to abandon principles, but to appear flexible in posture and tactics in order to bring about public understanding that it is the Soviets who are obstructing progress.

After its session in London the Working Group would have to make a report to the Ministers. It could not get anywhere unless the delegations were clearly instructed. It was bad to have the German Delegation join in drafting papers only subsequently to be repudiated by its own government. The problem must be solved for if, when the Foreign Ministers meet again late in April, there are still decided differences, the Soviets would exploit them as they had in the past. As a practical matter, the Soviets would not surrender their position except to gain a position more favorable to them. The Working Group must have some latitude in drawing up its proposals, otherwise the West will enter the Geneva conference in a disorganized fashion. The Acting Secretary said he concurred with Ambassador Bruce's remarks. He said that, even if the four Foreign Ministers could agree, there was also the problem of dealing with our NATO Allies.

Ambassador Grewe noted that, practically, this meant the Federal Republic must put forward some further concrete proposals, perhaps in lieu of the Laender scheme, which would fit into the stages of the reunification process. The Acting Secretary agreed in encouraging the Germans to produce something which would fall into place within the staged plan.

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